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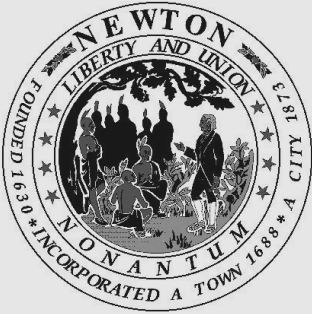
# CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## ZONING REFORM GROUP

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### MEETING NOTES

DATE: August 16, 2011



The Zoning Reform Scoping Group (ZRG) met on August 16, 2011. Attending were Alderman Deborah Crossley, Chairman, Jason Rosenberg, Marc Hershman, Terry Morris, and Peter Kilborn; also in attendance were Seth Zeren, Chief Zoning Code Official and staff to the ZRG, Alderman Lisle Baker, Howard Levine, Phil Herr, Daphne Collins, Bob Halpin, and Alan Schlesinger.

**For more information please contact Seth Zeren at 617-796-1145 or [szeren@newtonma.gov](mailto:szeren@newtonma.gov).**

Setti D. Warren  
Mayor

#### Meeting Notes:

Candace Havens  
Director  
Planning & Development  
Department

The Chairman opened the Zoning Reform Group meeting by presenting the summary of the Public Workshop on July 27 for discussion by the group. There was general agreement that the meeting was a success and small observations were shared. The Chair read a list of themes, which had been prepared by Planning Department staff, which summarized the ZRG's preferred zoning changes and reflecting the public input at the previous workshop:

#### Members

Ald. Deborah Crossley, Chair  
Marc Hershman  
Peter Kilborn  
Jennifer Molinsky  
Terry Morris  
Jason Rosenberg  
Steve Vona

1. Make the ordinance better organized and easier to use
2. Simplify and streamline the permitting and review processes
3. Encourage vitality and mixed-use residential uses in village centers
4. Create soft transitions between village centers and residential neighborhoods
5. Use a campus-master planning process to manage institutional change
6. Rationalize and streamline parking regulations
7. Allow moderate, flexible growth on commercial corridors

This list of themes will be considered and expanded in the future as a key feature of the group's final recommendation.

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Out of this discussion, the conversation focused on the very significant and City-wide problems of parking regulations. Both the specific need to allow shared parking between uses with different temporal needs and the general desire to encourage internal or back-of-lot circulation patterns were discussed.

The red-dot voting exercise was summarized with Group members noting that two of the most popular categories concerned failures in the legislative process of the Board of Aldermen and in the need to distribute minor special permits to some other body ("downstreaming") such as staff, the ZBA, or the P&D Board.

#### **Commercial Subcommittee Report**

After debriefing the public workshop, the ZRG moved to discuss the most recent product of the Commercial Subcommittee in which the subcommittee members attempt to identify specific problem areas within the zoning ordinance. The group discussed the specific recommendations of the subcommittee on topics ranging from zoning along Needham Street to the need for use-tables, graphics, and other use interface improvements, to the need for different gradation of review and the barrier of parking regulations to small commercial development. The need for more fine grained and specific tools, such as neighborhood zones or overlay districts was also discussed. Several visitors sparked a discussion of a "menu" of items that the City desires in terms of the "form" of development and in the "effects" or "function" of the development. A Group member suggested that there are at most six areas of the City where there is significant potential for zoning changes to spur more and better development and suggested that changes could focus incrementally on those areas.

The ZRG also discussed how this work could serve as a template for the other subcommittees in delving deeper into specific areas of concern within the zoning ordinance. It was recognized that some zoning fixes may be most appropriate on a specific, defined scale while other changes may be necessary City wide.

#### **Next Steps**

The Commercial and Residential subcommittees agreed to meet again before the next meeting to discuss and work on writing up guidelines on the idea of



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soft transitions between village centers and residential neighborhoods—where business and moderate density residential uses can co-exist.

The full group agreed on two meetings, September 22 and October 13, to continue their work, with subcommittee meetings to take place in the interim. After identifying those areas that are in particular need of revision, the ZRG will shift its focus to the specific process of reform and how consultants, citizens, and staff may best be employed to achieve the scope and scale of changes to be recommended.